Released for Press use

NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

No. 69 TORONTO November, 1946

CHINESE ROYAL ROBES

Close to a hundred elaborate Chinese costumes will be displayed in the Chinese Fresco Gallery of the Royal Ontario Museum, November 7th to December 1st. The show has been made possible through the generosity of the Robert Simpson Company, and many of the costumes were their gift to the museum.

The gorgeous colours and exquisite needlework represent the wealth of the Chinese court throughout the centuries of the Ching dynasty, which toppled in the Chinese revolution of 1911.

The wealth of design combined with the stylized embroidery was strictly controlled by custom. Those rich embroideries were not merely decoration. Each motif had a special meaning, and the number of dragons and even the number of their claws was significant.

The women's costumes show what court ladies wore, both in summer and in winter. Special embroidery stitches used will be demonstrated in large-scale models, along with explanations of the symbolism of the designs.

A complementary exhibit in the adjoining gallery will display such things as fans, hats, shoes and embroidered furnishings. It will be a priceless opportunity to see this extensive collection displayed all together.

COMING OUR WAY

While many of our feathered friends have taken themselves south with the approach of chilly weather, that does not mean that the birds have all gone. To many a bird Ontario is practically tropical. During late autumn and winter we may observe birds which we cannot see at any other season of the year, ornithologists of the Royal Ontario Museum declare.

Among these birds are the familiar ones such as the slaty grey junco, sometimes called the black snowbird. You'll know him at once by the white feather at either side of his tail. In company with tree sparrows, also down for the winter, the juncoes feast on weed seeds that remain above the snow level. Snow buntings too whirl up from fields of weed seeds like a flock of snowflakes blown by the wind.

The Bohemian waxwing is a jaunty fellow in grey and brown and yellow, with blobs of red on each wing, like drops of sealing wax. The scarlet berries of the mountain ash are his favourite snack. He is a little smaller than a robin, as are the Pine Grosbeaks and the Evening Grosbeaks, also winter guests. The Pine Grosbeak is rosy red in colour, and you'll see him searching out the seeds of the ash tree. The Evening Grosbeak is a dashing fellow in canary colours. He prefers the seeds of the Manitoba maple, or box elder.

The Northern Shrike, with the black mask over his eyes, may be a desperado, but he's not all bad. Mice form the greater part of his food. He hangs them on a thorn or barbed wire fence until his lunch hour comes, accounting for his name the "butcher bird."

TOPAZ FOR NOVEMBER

When is a topaz not a topaz? When it is yellow sapphire, or yellow quartz, which are often sold commercially as topaz. The true topaz is a much rarer and finer stone. But the term topaz is often loosely applied, for the topaz is the most popular yellow stone in jewellery.

Many people believe that all yellow stones are topazes, and that all topazes are yellow. But they're wrong. A glance into the Royal Ontario Museum shows topazes ranging from colourless through pale yellow right up to a sherry-brown. They come in pale blue and pale green, the latter often being sold as aquamarine. Very rare are the naturally red and pink topazes, but these can be simulated by heating, in an artificial process known as "pinking."

Topaz is a very hard stone, a fluo-silicate of aluminum. It can be cut very easily though, and takes a high polish on the buffing wheels.

The rhyme goes:

"Who first comes to this world below
Under Sagittarius should know
That their true gem should ever show a topaz."

Just why, it's hard to say. But the topaz has come to be the birthstone for November.

It is found in many a list of precious stones in ancient writings In early times, St. Hildegarde highly recommended the use of topaz soaked in wine as a cure for dimness of sight. But oculists today wouldn't give a penny for her thoughts on the subject.

BURIED ALIVE!

In his tales of mystery and imagination, Edgar Allen Poe keeps harking back to the horror of being buried alive. But most of our turtles and frogs look forward to it. Some have been doing it for years.

At the Royal Ontario Museum you may see the painted turtle and his big cousin the snapper prowling around in the glass cases up on the third floor. But those in the swamps and ponds cease their activities when the cold weather sets in.

The turtles feed well during the summer and are in a nice comfortable condition when it's time for their long winter nap. Down they sink into the soft mud at the bottom of the pond, there to remain buried alive until the warmth of spring calls them forth again. Many species of frogs do likewise, and they may be frozen stiff without suffering harm.

COMING EVENTS

National Education Week, November 3rd to 9th, is open house for parents and interested adults at the Royal Ontario Museum. During that week they are invited to attend gallery talks along with visiting school classes.